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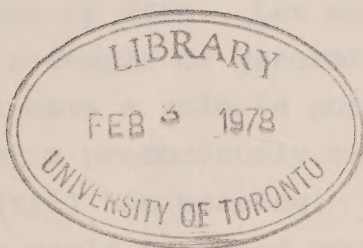
C O N F E R E N C E

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The Role of the Government of Ontario  
in Post-Secondary Education



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The subject which I've been given has the terrible ring of the title of a Ph.D. Thesis from a Faculty of Education: The Role of the Government of Ontario in Post-Secondary Education. One expects a piece that is mouthy with footnotes; that contains elliptical references to earlier and forgotten works by dubious experts who are now respectable enough to sit on examining committees; a work that is of such a style that nobody but a tax collector or an academic is likely to plod through the stodge.

The title--if you haven't guessed--was given to me by Norm Sisco who, I notice, has drawn a much better topic for himself. And while I will remember Norm's courtesy in giving me the opportunity of being with you today, I shall be no less forgetful of the vehicle he has used. I suspect that by the time we're through you will share a degree of my disgruntlement.

But one can't allow facetious introductions to go on forever. This is not, after all, the preface to a Shaw play, or the preamble to a corporation's statement of accounts or, for that matter, the preliminary excuses of a president's report. There's a limit to the hawking and spitting that an honest audience like you will put up with. Let me try to come to the point.

In a couple of generations, the question "Why should the government have a role in post-secondary education?", might be answered by a precociously cryptic, "Why not?" But today the question still has meaning. And while our answers to it may vary, they would be based upon the same historical runaway--which I'll endeavour to sketch very quickly.

The ancient academies of higher learning were independent of the State. So far as I know, there was no equivalent to the Ontario Student Assistance Program to make Plato's Academy available to the lower income group. Indeed, the lower income group--and they represented a large proportion--were slaves. (This fact is often forgotten as we remember the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome). And while I have no positive evidence to indicate that there was actually no state





grant to support educational pursuits, I suspect that Board ceilings and the BIU would look magnificently generous in comparison to any money that was then available.

The subsequent initiative of the Church in founding and operating universities is well known to you; and, concurrently, there were institutions which entirely depended upon the fees of students, whatever their religious convictions. But, in either event, the university could hardly be said to hold its doors very wide open.

In the western world until about 150 years ago, there was generally no alternative to that sort of post-secondary education which involved either university or apprenticing to a trade. It is tempting to suggest that there was little secondary and primary education, either; but we should take care, because while the selection of students was inequitable, some parts of Europe did have a fairly well developed school system which, although we would describe it as primitive, might not look bad in a longer perspective.

While it is not the only breakthrough, a landmark was struck in the separation of post-secondary education from the Church by the founding of the University of London. Its concern with science, at the expense of the traditional study of the Classics, was alluded to in a satirical verse by Winthrop Mackworth Praed, in 1825:

But let them not babble of Greek to the rabble,  
Nor teach the Mechanics their letters;  
The labouring classes were born to be asses,  
And not to be aping their betters.

I drag in the verse not only to show that I have read Praed, but for a reason which should be significant to this audience. The founding of the University of London represented more than a pulling away from Church: it represented an acceptance of practical subjects.

The nature of granites, the tricks of the planets,  
The forces of steams and of gases,  
The engines mechanical, the long word botanical,  
The ranging of beetles in classes .....





And, while I won't elaborate upon the point, for it will lead to such tempting debate that I couldn't resist it, there is a subtle connection between the recognition of science and applied science as respectable academic pursuits, and the dissociation of university from Church.

From the mid-nineteenth century for almost a hundred years, there was an irrational mixture of post-secondary opportunities in most countries of the western world. The "land-grant colleges" in the United States reflected a recognition of the importance of practical pursuits at the post-secondary level, while the privately endowed institutions catered to a different cut. In Britain, until about 1940, one had to be very clever if one were not very wealthy to go to university; but there were many alternative routes to financial and intellectual fulfillment.

In Canada, institutionalized post-secondary programs lay in the universities, with few exceptions. And a substantial function of the universities was to provide a teaching system with teachers. (A much more lively topic than the Role of Government in Post-Secondary Education, would be the development of a sort of family tree of pedagogical incest).

A recognition of the sciences, the force of industrialization, the maturing of elementary and secondary education, are among the important components of the growth of post-secondary opportunities. Collectively they pressed for resources that could not be provided by the fees of students nor the providence of the Church. Government had to step in--as it does in all enterprises which call for large amounts of money but do not develop easily definable commensurate profits.

I think, if I tried hard enough and had a sympathetic audience, I could trace a history of the manufacture of--let's say--stainless steel, which would parallel the development of our educational system in terms of sophistication, public interest and cultural maturity. But stainless steel seems to pay for itself: It's the product of private enterprise. The





business of education, while it contributes to a nation's wealth, does not do so in such an easily identifiable way. Financial cost-benefit analyses of education are elusive--and I have to confess that I hope they will remain so. Consequently, unless a state is content that education be purchased in the same way that stainless steel is purchased--that is, by those that have the cash, whether or not they really have the need--education costs have to be picked up by the government and paid for by public taxes. Health and social care programs are in a similar category.

The historical runway, which I have so imperfectly drawn, leads me to a conclusion that is difficult to confound: If educational opportunities are to look towards principles of equitability and accessibility, they must be publicly funded. Government must be involved.

This is not to say that every institution or program has to be supported by government. As you know, the private trade schools pursue their work without government support. And, so far as I know, there is nothing to prevent the establishment of a university so independent that it does not require grants from the government--but I have to add that we are not inundated with requests for this sort of thing.

More congruous to the contemporary sweep of events is the role of government in that less formalized "open sector" of post-secondary education. For while everybody properly insists that the availability of books, museums, pictures, performances, should not be constrained by government policies, everybody equally insists that these pursuits have to be heavily subsidized by government. The "open sector" is at the edge of an organizational period which the post-secondary institutions have already experienced. One wonders what history has taught us.

If we accept the inevitability of the role of government in all aspects of post-secondary education, a number of questions arise. I will pose them as questions, and I will select convenient ones which suggest alternative answers, none of which





(I have to emphasize) should be used against government, the Ministry--or even against me. I am only trying to paint a picture, that we may perhaps see a pattern.

The first question is whether reasonable accessibility to post-secondary education requires the intervention of government.

I think it does. The question is rather about the nature of the intervention: the abolition of fees; the provision of generous student aid; the guarantee of minimum wages; the introduction of contingency repayment programs; the requirement of post-graduate service for the public to repay educational costs. There are many alternatives; but all involve some sort of plan laid by government.

The second question is about the nature of the post-secondary opportunities which government subsidizes. Because this is a wide question, let me focus it upon a specific example. A student who wishes to study fine arts may enter an institution--university or college--where his education is subsidized, and he is eligible for student assistance. He is given a degree or a diploma if he successfully completes his course. But the person who wishes to informally educate himself in fine arts is not subsidized by government; he is not eligible for student assistance; he is charged admission to the galleries he wishes to visit; and he is not recognized by those bodies which regulate admissions to the profession of teaching.

The question I have asked leads to many supplementaries: whether government should support only institutionalized learning; to what extent it should provide resources for informal learning; whether employers unnecessarily screen applicants by the degrees and diplomas which are carried; whether professional bodies abuse their responsibility of protecting the public by rather protecting themselves; whether we tend to purvey 20th-century learning within a context of 19th-century teaching.

My third question has to do with government intervention in the matter of the incidence and content of post-secondary programs. Currently, government tries to measure manpower





requirements and to provide specific programs to train manpower through various schemes in which federal and provincial jurisdictions engage in an itchy relationship. The provinces, in one way or another, attempt to assess manpower requirements in the professional fields, and encourage, where necessary, the opening of new schools or programs so that the numbers of family practitioners or lawyers, or social workers may be appropriately influenced.

But the numbers of students entering English literature, or communication arts, or pottery is not directly steered by government. And while the demands of the market-place encourage students to enter, or to reject, such subjects as electronic technology, or physical education, or law, there is little market influence upon the people who want to study something simply for the hell of it.

The purpose of my question is only to indicate an obvious dilemma. If government is to allow a reasonable degree of freedom in its institutions--the autonomy of the universities, the response of the colleges to public demand--it cannot easily control the funds which are required to answer the demand. If, on the other hand, it is to respect the taxpayers' pocket-book, it must restrain the spending of the universities and colleges. The obvious question arises: To what extent should government direct the way in which the available funds are spent. Should it take an extreme attitude and set down quotas for medicine and French literature and pottery; or should it simply distribute the available monies according to some formula or other and leave the colleges and universities to do what they will? Or, if there is a decent middle path, what is its contour? (If you happen to know, I wish you would let me have your suggestions.)

My question about government responsibility in the nature of academic programs included a phrase about the content of programs. Let me deal with it quickly. If government takes the responsibility for distributing the taxpayers' dollar among educational programs which qualify a person to practise within the public, or simply improve the well-being of the person among





the public, ought the government to exercise some regulation of the length and content of the educational programs? I'm sure that your first reaction--as is mine--is to reject this. But what would you say if, for example, engineering schools required that in order to be admissible, a man or woman must first have a B.A., then pursue a five-year course, followed by a government subsidized internship program for three years, before he became a wage-earner? There is nothing, currently, to prevent this. If it were to occur, would government be expected to intercede? And, if it interceded in determining a program's length, could it avoid specifying the program's content? And, if it did this for engineering, how about--let's say--political science?

This sort of question--although not this specific one--often puts ministers of post-secondary education on the spot. Whatever the political affiliation of the questioner, it is easy for him to assert, on the one hand, that the government should have a greater control of the monies it provides colleges and universities; and, on the other hand, the questioner can insist upon greater autonomy for the institutions. In fact, it is not unusual to receive--at decently spaced intervals--questions from the same person which insist upon tighter reins on post-secondary institutional spending, and which call for more participatory democracy upon the campuses.

The questions I have put--and there are many like them, and dozens more surrounding them--all relate to this same dilemma. How can government simultaneously provide post-secondary resources and accessibility, encourage independence among the institutions it supports, and yet be accountable to the public?

That there is no simple answer to this key problem is illustrated by the repetitiousness of the criticisms, comments and questions which arise in the press, on campus and in the House. And, I might add, in the minds of most of us that have anything to do with the provision and delivery of educational services.





But, while there is no answer, there is a respectable safeguard, which prevents government from becoming too assertive, and post-secondary institutions from growing irresponsible. The safeguard lies in the bodies which are interposed between the institutions and government: the boards of governors and the advisory bodies.

So that you may not become too restless, let me assure you that I'm drawing to a close, as I indicate briefly the role of governors and advisory councils in the structure of post-secondary education.

If there were but one post-secondary institution in the province, I would expect its board to directly represent its hopes and needs to the government. Government and board would work out the level of financial support, and agree upon the general picture of services to be provided. The development of programs within the financial constraints and along the general lines agreed to, ought to be the business of the administration and faculty of the institution.

Such a working relationship between board and government is complicated by the proliferation of numbers and types of post-secondary resources. But this does not deny the necessity of board working well with administration and faculty. The common tendency of faculty--at university as well as at college--to regard the board as an opposition rather than as a partner is, to my mind, regrettable. It weakens the power of the institution; and it encourages an unnecessary intervention of government.

The complexity associated with large numbers of colleges and universities is offset by the establishment of advisory bodies--for example, the Council of Regents. Without eroding the individuality of the college boards, or trespassing upon the autonomy of the college, the advisory board offers both a protection for the college against government interference, and a means by which government may deal equitably with the colleges.

While I appreciate the special functions of the Council of Regents, and the enormous amount of work which it does, I think it might be worthwhile for its membership to ask whether it fits





the role I have suggested. A role which guarantees reasonable freedom to the colleges, and which persuades not only government, but critics of government, that the colleges are equitably treated within inevitable constraints.

In the same sort of way, I have to ask whether the boards see themselves in the context I have sketched. Are they, for example, sufficiently aware of public pressures that they can protect their colleges against any abuses that might result? At the same time, are they sufficiently aware of the resources and capacity of their colleges that they can represent their colleges' aspirations? Do they completely trust their faculties? Do their faculties completely trust them? Have the boards fully explored their relationship with the Council of Regents?

I hope these questions don't strike you as impertinent. That's not my intention at all. Rather, I'm anxious to suggest that in the rapid growth of our post-secondary system, within an environment of changing social expectations, the role of government has necessarily altered. Government has in many fields become less of a housekeeper and more of a manager. Perhaps more of a director.

I won't debate the values involved in this shift. I'm only concerned that within a changing context you effectively assert yourselves as governors and as regents. By such assertiveness the role of government in post-secondary education will be influenced by your views--and that, surely is what it's all about.



the role I have suggested. A role which guarantees reasonable freedom to the colleges, and which provides not only government, but critics of government, that the colleges are actively created within institutional constraints.

In the same sort of way, I have to ask whether the boards are themselves in the position I have mentioned. Are they, for example, sufficiently aware of public pressures that they can protect their colleges against any danger that might result? Is the same true, and they sufficiently aware of the resources and capacity of their colleges that they can represent their colleges satisfactorily to their constituents? Do their constituents completely trust them? Have the boards fully explored their relationships with the Council of Regents?

I hope these questions don't strike you as repetitious. That's not my intention at all. Rather, I'm anxious to suggest that in the rapid growth of our post-secondary system, within an environment of changing social expectations, the role of government has necessarily altered. Government has in many fields become less of a participant and more of a manager. Perhaps more of a director.

I won't debate the values involved in this shift. I'm only concerned that within a changing context you effectively assess yourselves as government and as agents. By such assessment the role of government in post-secondary education will be influenced by your view--and that, better, in what it's all about.